

and mining communities. The mining families learn to live with the daily threat of sudden death or they quit and move away from the precarious life, finding other ways to earn their living.

But the mines have an attraction for many despite the risk, the frequent layoffs and the dark, grimy work environment. The pay is good and the mines are far safer than they were, say, 85 years ago when 200 miners died in an explosion at the Winter Quarters Mine at Scofield, or in 1924, when 171 were killed in an explosion at the Number 2 Mine at Castle Gate. At any rate, survivor benefits are better.

Those who stay on figure the odds are good enough to justify the gamble. Many miners live out their lives without suffering severe injury and die at home in bed or on the highway or on the golf course or in the hospital or nursing home — just like ordinary folk.

Since 1900, safer, more efficient mining methods and equipment have been developed. Wholesale slaughter has become rarer in the mines but fatal mine deaths have not been eliminated. Instead of dying by the dozens, today's miners are killed one or two at a time, sometimes more — "Falling rock kills Tennessee man;" "Miner killed in tumble down shaft;" "Father of 11 dies in Carbon mishap;" "Eureka miner killed." The headlines recur from time to time but are small, buried on the inside pages. Blase readers scan them and quickly turn to other topics that pique their interest.

Occasional group fatalities stir more attention and sometimes, as in the recent Wilberg Mine disaster in which 27 were killed, arouse the public to an outpouring of sympathy and assistance. Since 1924, providentially, these accidents have been on a smaller scale — 23 died in a 'black damp' explosion at the Sunnyside Mine in 1945; 18 were killed in an explosion at the Texas Gulf Sulphur Co. Potash Mine near Moab, in 1963, and another 9 were killed in the same year in an explosion at the Carbon Fuel Co. Mine at Helper.

But whether the deaths have been single or multiple, the losses have been no less devastating to those affected. The Scofield Mine disaster, Utah's worst, left a scar on the state that will not disappear even though scarcely a handful of people remember the fateful day, May 1, 1900. At that time, it was the worst mine disaster in the country in terms of lives lost.